

Carbondale News

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Russell's Dairy, 56 Belmont Street,

By S. ROBERT POWELL

From the spring of 1932 to the spring of 1939, Helen (Russell) Powell worked in the office of the Russell Dairy Company and the Russell Ice Cream Company, 56-58 Belmont Street.

Ed Isger began working for the Russell Dairy Company in 1927 when he graduated from high school. He started out as an extra man—covering when others were sick or on vacation. In 1950, Ed and his brother Bob bought the Russell Dairy Company and together they operated Isger's Dairy for nineteen years, when they sold out to Stephens' Brothers.

We talked with Helen Powell and Ed Isger and learned a great deal about the Russell Dairy Company and the Russell Ice Cream Company.

The Russell Dairy Company—which

sold a complete line of milk and milk products, retail and wholesale—was started by George McClelland Russell (born February 21, 1862, died April 30, 1926), who, together with his wife Lydia Spencer (born April 3, 1864, died October 27, 1953), and their three children—Margaret (Russell) MacMillan, Maurice Spencer Russell and Ernest Spencer Russell—moved into town from their farm outside of Carbondale (the present Edward Cosklo farm) and organized the Russell Dairy Company on Belmont Street.

Helen Powell, a niece of George and Lydia Russell, reported that "the dairy was in back of the house at 56 Belmont, where Uncle George and Aunt Lydia lived. Later they moved to a house on Oak Avenue, which is where they were living when Uncle George died. Their

son Ernest Spencer—every one called him Spencer—then moved into 56 Belmont. In 1938, Spencer moved to Philadelphia and Ed Isger moved into the house. Bob Isger's son, John, now lives at 56 Belmont."

Following the death of George Russell, the dairy was taken over by his younger son, Spencer, who married Lois Bennett on October 19, 1921. Spencer's older brother, Maurice, was not especially interested in the dairy business, and returned to the country to live and farm.

The milk for the dairy was obtained from Greenfield and Fell Townships and from Waymart. Ed Isger told us that "Deacon Thomas used to drive the Brockway truck out in the country and pick up the milk. He picked up about 90 cans a day in Greenfield and Fell. At the top of the season, the cans were double

was one of the city's early dairies

decked on the truck. We picked up milk from Whitmore's, Marshall's, Jesse Gardner, Henry Spencer, Maurice Russell, Will Russell (22-27 cans per day), Jesse Kenyon, from the Long Pond area and from the Poor Farm. The milk from the Waymart area was brought to the dairy directly by the farmers. We didn't pick it up as we did in Greenfield and Fell."

There were five milk routes in Carbondale and one in Simpson. Benny Vanisky had the Simpson route. The drivers on the five Carbondale routes at one time were Joe Bailey, Chuck Allen, Harry Baldwin, Billy Fitch, and Myron (Micky) Zimmerman. Cy Grosvenor recalled, in a letter to the NEWS dated June 6, 1983, that "Spencer, when he was young, helped his father with the milk delivery. During the winter when the going was bad, George Russell

would park the sleigh in which the milk was carried on Canaan Street. Spencer would fill two carriers with full bottles and trudge through a Canaan Street yard to Dickson Avenue, where he'd make deliveries to our house and to others on the street."

Ed Isger recalled: "We'd start delivering milk at 3 a.m. We had double lanterns—one on the front and one on the back, plus a lantern inside the milk wagon to see with. Seven days a week we went out. If you worked in the dairy, you worked seven days a week. In the summer we drove wagons, each of which held 45 cases of milk. In the winter, we drove sleighs. The barns for the horses were first on Belmont Street and then on Birkett Street. The wagon and sleigh shed was on Belmont. We had the first rubber-tired wheels on a

milk wagon in town. We even had rubber shoes put on the horses to keep the noise down. Emmett Pugh was the blacksmith. He worked at the Coalbrook Breaker. Wynn Gavitt lived in the house at 58 Belmont, which has since burned down. Wynn was the watchman and fireman. He took care of the horses. The wheels on the milk wagons were 16-600s. We delivered the milk with horses and wagons or sleighs until 1949, when Spencer bought four trucks for the four milk routes. Two of the trucks were GMC milk trucks that were purchased from Mike Perry and the other two trucks were Dodges and were bought from Dean Johnson."

NOTE: This is part I of the two-part history of the Russell Dairy Company and the Russell Ice Cream Company that will be published in the NEWS.